



Twelve Kinds of Ice

Ellen Bryan Obed , Barbara McClintock (Illustrator)

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With the first ice—a skim on a sheep pail so thin it breaks when touched—one family's winter begins in earnest. Next comes ice like panes of glass. And eventually, skating ice! Take a literary skate over field ice and streambed, through sleeping orchards and beyond. The first ice, the second ice, the third ice . . . perfect ice . . . the last ice . . . Twelve kinds of ice are carved into twenty nostalgic vignettes, illustrated in elegantly scratched detail by the award-winning Barbara McClintock.

Twelve Kinds of Ice Details

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From Reader Review Twelve Kinds of Ice for online ebook

Barb Middleton says

Life with ice. Black ice can mean doing a 360 with the car at a stop sign screaming with your daughter as it becomes a whirly-bird. Regular ice can mean your feet being swept out from underneath you levitating your body so that it is parallel to the ground before squashing you like a bug on the cold, hard asphalt. January ice can mean tossing a bucket of water in the air and watching it freeze before it hits the ground. That was in 1996 when temperatures were almost -60 degrees fahrenheit. February ice can mean stepping outside with damp hair that turns into icicle wind chimes. I felt like the ice goddess on those days. Medusa had snakes. I had ice shards. I'd show up at school and show off the latest Minnesota hair fashion. Ice can mean creating a toboggan run that goes down your backyard hill at speeds that frosts your breath onto your skin in a ghostly face mask. Ice is fun. Ice is hazardous. Ice is mysterious. Ellen Bryan Obed captures this magic in her 61 page book that focuses on the transformation of ice in the surrounding landscape. The nostalgia and beauty of Obed's writing makes for a beautiful piece that can be used in "writer's workshop" to teach small moments; a nice read aloud to show atmosphere, setting, and sensory details; or a warm snuggle with a magical book.

When fall comes the ice slowly transforms from a thin sheet on the top of an ice pail to a solid block freezing streams and lakes. When the narrator describes the transformation of the ice rink in the back yard I was transported to the past of skating in my purple parka with my 4 siblings. We didn't have shows like the author describes or pump music outside over a loudspeaker but they did do that at some of the city parks. We would break off icicles and lick them like ice pops. Of course we didn't think about what we were licking as we broke off the beautiful shapes that formed from condensation dripping down sun-warmed, slanty roofs. Yum - bug and tar flavored ice pops. Obed describes twelve stages of ice and ends with dream ice. This ending captures the magic of ice and the possibilities. As you can see I haven't talked much about the book because my own memories keep cropping into the sentences sidetracking me.

I have noticed when I write book reviews I give 5 stars much more easily with fantasy than realistic books. I think the unbelievable factor makes me more forgiving of elements that aren't realistic in fantasy; whereas, I'm more critical if a book is "real." I also like fantasy as a genre most and must have an unconscious bias towards it. Guess I'm writing this because this could be a five star. I just thought there was a lull in some spots, but I'm such a jet pants I also like lots of action. This book requires more patience. That's my disclaimer anyway. I did enjoy the nostalgia of ice in this book and delicious writing. I confess as an adult I think now of how uncomfortable ice skates are, how many times I've frostbit my toes, and how hard it is shoveling mountains of wet snow. This is a good reminder of the joys of winter as a child. The magic of the ice rink, playing hockey with my brothers, pretending with my daughter we were Olympic ice figure skaters, racing across the ice and sliding on our seats, flipping into snowbanks going full speed, playing broom ball, and more. I need to keep that child alive inside me, and this book certainly does that well.

Tasha says

Oh my. There are few books that leave me with tears standing in my eyes at the end, especially books of a spare 64 pages. This one did.

I suppose I could leave my review at that, but here are some details for those who need more. This tightly written and beautifully illustrated small book looks at the twelve kinds of ice that happen in the course of a winter. It all starts with the first ice which is the thin ice on top of a bucket in the barn that breaks when you touch it. From there excitement builds as slowly the ice gets thicker and more able to be skated on. Some ice like field ice and stream ice can be skated on, but it's tricky. Garden ice is the ice rink that the Bryan family created in their garden, made by packing the snow very firm and then spraying it with the garden hose. It is that family skating rink that is really celebrated in the book, showing a strong family and their mutual connection through ice skating. Even the ice skaters and hockey players get along. Most of the time!

Obed is telling the story of her own family and their love of skating. Her writing is so beautiful and strong. She tells a story with depth and feeling, celebrating winter, ice and the thrill of skating. Seeing how short the book is, one wonders how she managed to tell so much in so few pages. Her prose invites us into her family and onto ice skates. Alongside her, we don't so much as wobble but instead skim across the ice at her side. It's an exhilarating and intensely personal read.

McClintock's illustrations are entirely black and white in the book. She captures a timelessness in her images, celebrating the family and natural surroundings. She also shows the movement of skating and its thrill.

This is a quiet book, one that will need some push to get it into children's hands. I can see it being part of anyone's holiday and also a great gateway to talking about your own memories of childhood and special things your family does together. Quiet but powerful and immensely satisfying. Appropriate for ages 6-9.

Tara says

Reads like the classic books I grew up with: Cricket in Times Square, Miss Bianca, Rabbit Hill, but more poetic. A lovely story about a family who gathers and lives around ice in Maine. Will baffle the kids of today about how families used to entertain themselves. Highly recommend for young readers and parents who love to read out loud to their kids.

Mary Ellen says

I don't love ice. I detest the cold. This book was so beautifully written that it took me beyond my total annoyance with ice and transported me to a place where I could imagine that winter was magic. It was beautifully written and illustrated.

A masterpiece for sure.

Katie Fitzgerald says

The text in this book is so lyrical and lovely in its nostalgic descriptions of a family's backyard ice rink in Maine. Each very short chapter describes a segment of the winter season, taking the reader on a journey from the earliest ice of the year, through a thaw, and on to the last skate of the season. I read the book aloud, and I think that made me appreciate the language even more as I was able to slow down and really enjoy the words. The line drawings by Barbara McClintock match the mood of the story perfectly, and they depict

beautifully the joy the children feel when they skate and the warm relationship the children have with their father, who lovingly creates and maintains the rink for them each year.

I would not necessarily call this a book for preschoolers, as I think the intended audience is middle grade readers, but I did read it to my four-year-old with great success. It helped that we had already read about skating in *Happy Little Family* because the vocabulary was familiar, but even without that context, I think she would have enjoyed it almost as much. I think it would also be interesting to pair this book in the future with some other skating books my daughter has not yet heard, such as *A Day on Skates* by Hilda Van Stockum and *Far Out the Long Canal* by Meindert deJong.

Lynn says

This was my childhood! We never had the wonderful constructed rink the family had but we skated on the streams and the swampy part of the field next to my house and then on Blackbird Pond. Hockey fought with figure skating and it usually ended up in crack the whip ;-) With global warming and limited outdoor time, I don't know if kids get this experience today but Obed captures it exactly. Lovely lovely evocative writing that will give kids a taste of what winters used to be like.

Betsy says

Every year the children's librarians of the New York Public Library system come together and create a list of 100 Titles for Reading and Sharing. The list, now entering its 101st year, originally had a dual purpose. On the one hand it was meant to highlight the best children's books at a time when finding books written specifically for kids was difficult in and of itself (the "100" number idea came later). On the other hand, when printed out the list was intended to serve as a Christmas shopping guide for parents looking to give away quality works of children's literature with the potential to someday be considered "classics". These days, that idea of using the list as a shopping guide has become less important, but the search for books that aim for "classic" ranks never ceases. Such books are difficult to find, partly because the ones that try to feel that way utilize this sickening faux nostalgia that, in particularly egregious examples, can make your hair curl. That's why a book like *Twelve Kinds of Ice* strikes me as such a rarity. Here we have something that feels like something your grandmother might have read you, yet is as fresh and fun and original as you could hope for. Original and difficult to categorize, the one thing you can say about it is that it defies you to sum it up neatly. And that it's delightful, of course. That too.

In this family there are twelve kinds of ice. All the kids know this fact. "The First Ice" is that thin sheen you find in pails. "The Second Ice" can be pulled out like panes of glass. As the winter comes on, the days grow colder and colder and the kids wait in anticipation. Finally, after the appearance of "Black Ice" it's time to turn the vegetable garden into a skating rink that will last the whole winter. The whole family creates the sides and uses the hose to create the perfect space. With crisp prose designed to make you feel excited and cozy all at once, the author goes through a full winter with this family. There are sibling rivalries for ice time, skating parties, comic routines, an ice show, and then finally those spring days where you can only skate an hour before the sun starts making puddles. Fortunately for all the kids there's one kind of ice left and that is dream ice. The ice where you can skate everything from telephone wires to slanting roofs and it will last you all the year until the first ice comes again.

My instinct here is to just start quoting large sections of the text out of context so that you can listen to the wordplay. The trouble is that much of this book works precisely because those very words, when read as part of the story, simply feel like there was no other way to say that exact thing at that exact moment. So, for example, when we read “Black Ice” section where the ice has arrived before the snow, we have to know that the kids are skating on a Great Pond. We read that “We sped to silver speeds at which lungs and legs, clouds and sun, wind and cold, race together. Our blades spit out silver. Our lungs breathed out silver. Our minds burst with silver while the winter sun danced silver down our bending backs.” It helps to know that until now the kids have been limited to Field Ice (narrow strips) and Stream Ice (uneven and broken by rocks). This is the moment when they’re free to skate the way they want to at long last for the first time that season. Context is everything, but even out of context you can see how beautifully Obed phrases things.

Libraries may find it difficult to place this book though. Is it really an early chapter book when the text contains such sophistication at times? Yet you can’t really put it in the full chapter book section when it’s only 64 pages, can you? This isn’t the first time author Ellen Obed has thwarted catalogers’ inclinations. Her picture book (first book?) *Who Would Like a Christmas Tree : A Tree for All Seasons* stymied a lot of us when we realized that in spite of the fact that the word “Christmas” was in the title, that book really wasn’t holiday fare. Indeed the book is actually an incredibly lovely year long look (Obed’s a fan of the big picture) at what a coniferous tree does during the entire year, not just December. It’s rare to find an author willing to upset expectations in this way. Rare and, I’ll confess, kind of nice too. So how do we use this book? My suspicion is that it will find an audience with already existing ice skating fans (the ones not quite old enough for Kate Messner’s *Sugar and Ice*, be bedtime fare for sleepy young, and be beloved of those kids for whom the idea of having your own backyard ice skating rink verges on unbridled fantasy. There may be parents out there who have to explain patiently why they can’t have an ice skating rink too. Beats explaining why they can’t have a pony, I suppose.

If we were to have objections with the text, it wouldn’t be with the prose but the subjects. At one point we see that the rules of rink state that the kids who want to figure skate get one hour and the hockey skaters another. And, of course, the girls all do the figure skating and the boys the hockey. It would break with the narrative to mention the boy who wanted to figure skate or the girl who wanted to play hockey, I know, but you can’t help but wish for at least one small casual aside about the girls playing hockey once in a while or the boys doing leaps of their own. This way it just reinforces the old stereotypes, true though they may often be.

When I was young my favorite picture book was Tasha Tudor’s *A Time to Keep*. What entranced me about the book wasn’t necessarily the prose or the pictures (though I loved them very much) but the sense of watching a large group over time have a great deal of fun with their family traditions. There was this overwhelming sense of a huge loveable community, and that intrigued me to my core. *Twelve Kinds of Ice* taps into that same sense and feeling, and illustrator Barbara McClintock could certainly be seen as the second coming of Tudor sans the whole living like it’s the 19th century thing. Never adequately recognized as the genius she is, here her black and white pen and inks run rampant over the pages. Sometimes serving as spot illustrations, as humorous asides (as when the dad does his clown routine on the ice), and sometimes as glorious fantasy spreads over two pages, she consistently wows. I also enjoyed the fact that though the pictures seem timeless in a sense, they’re still contemporary (one girl sports a hoodie in the “locker room”, etc).

There was a great little YouTube video out last year that made a running catalog of phrases overused by book reviewers. Ask any reviewer and they’ll confess that there are certain terms they fall back on when the brain shuts off but the fingers keep typing. One of mine is the term “gem”. I’ve made a little vow to never use it again, but it’s killing me not to whip it out right now because there’s no word in the English language

to describes this book quite as clearly. In desperation I turn to the authors that blurbed the book early on. Joyce Sidman said it was "glorious as a perfect stretch of ice" (she also said it was a gem, but she's allowed). Chris Raschka said it was "grand and ethereal". Reeve Lindbergh said it was "sharp and fresh". And the great Newbery Award winning author Laura Amy Schlitz who, up until this time has never blurbed *anything* at all said it best with, "Obed's prose is crystalline: clear, pure, and entrancing." For my part I'll put aside the word "gem" and simply say that this is a bedtime book, a storytime book, a precious book that will be remembered but some folks long after we reviewers and blurbers are dead. Let's just say a book like this one doesn't come along every day. Would that they did.

For ages 6-10.

Jim Erekson says

This was rare for me. I was so sucked into the nostalgia of this book, that I felt like I had to read some of the reviews on goodreads before writing my own. Usually I don't check in like that before writing, because I like to write based on my aesthetic response. The best thing I found by reading the reviews was the category term 'memoir'. But Lu Benke's use of the term 'mood book' also seems applicable--I was focused clearly on one topic, and the characters, events, and details around this topic all worked to give me a 'feel' for what ice means to some people. You can tell the editors in charge of this book thought they had an award winner--they spared no expense in special size of book, design, cover, etc.

Overall, I would categorize this book as a genre-breaker. It clearly has informational elements to it, giving a culturally embedded informational look at ice--from the point of view of a Northeastern US family, but easily applicable to the culture in many provinces in Canada or the northern Midwest US. It clearly has some autobiographical elements in it, but the story is fictionalized and exaggerated (not by grand hyperbole, but by concentration and focus). Lu says it's categorized solidly in fiction on WorldCat. The book also has the same kind of curious seasonal structure we might remember from Sendak's *Chicken Soup, with Rice*. One of my favorite details, however, was how Obed so intentionally avoided using months and days in the earliest parts of the book. This gave me the feel that the ice was truly the marker of time, not the calendar. Then as the ice disappeared, the calendar came back into prominence.

McClintock's illustrations are charming as all get out. Pauline Baynes is who immediately came to mind, but Robert McCloskey was close behind (actually, after discussing it with Nancy, McCloskey isn't quite right--these illustrations have a much more imaginative vein rather than the realism of McCloskey). The double-page spreads are wonders of the crisp drawing style that was such a hallmark of the magazine illustrations and commercial art of the 1920s-1960s. I enjoy looking at that kind of skilled drawing.

All that said, this book is totally white bread. And the appeal to nostalgia probably isn't the best recommendation for a book to get top honors, even if the awards are only annual. What this book does in structure is SO similar to what I experienced while reading *Jimmy the Greatest!* And Jimmy did so much more to knock me into a different world (making the strange familiar and the familiar strange) that I think it's far superior. I enjoyed both, and found myself asking my family and friends to look at both.

Manybooks says

While in many ways Ellen Bryan Obed's Twelve Kinds of Ice truly is both utterly charming and totally, nostalgically captures both the magic of childhood and the author's intense joyful appreciation of and for winter and in particular ice skating, as someone who has always loved loved loved winter but has also never really been able to learn to skate with any amount of ease (and has equally received more than enough critical negativity due to my lack of being able to even mediocrely master that great Canadian, Northern USA winter past-time), I actually have found some of the depicted and related episodes a trifle sad and personally frustrating, especially since virtually everything in Twelve Kinds of Ice seems to revolve around skating, and I guess I was kind of hoping to also read about winter pursuits and joys more relevant to and for me (such as for example downhill or cross country skiing, both of which I have certainly always been much better at than skating, than balancing myself on slippery ice).

However Twelve Kinds of Ice is obviously not my story, it is Ellen Bryan Obed's childhood memories of her family's winter fun (and for her family, winter obviously has always meant skating, and indeed skating on as many different types of ice for as long as possible, something that is also probably tinged with more than a bit of regretful sadness now, since the long and cold winters of the past, even in the traditional snow and ice belt areas of North America, are becoming if not increasingly rare then certainly of much shorter general duration). With Barbara McClintock's detailed black and white accompanying illustrations providing a descriptive and magical complement and mirror to and for Ellen Bryan Obed's engaging narrative (well, at least in my copy of Twelve Kinds of Ice, the illustrations are black and white), Twelve Kinds of Ice truly lets readers enter into and glory in the winters of the author's childhood and how much fun she and her siblings had on many different types of ice surfaces (so much so that I almost but not yet quite wish that I had actually learned to skate a bit better, and the not yet quite is simply and entirely personal, as trying to learn how to ice skate was sadly an exercise in both futility and often of much pain for me, with multiple sprained ankles and bruised knees, as well as having to face the numerous taunts by both family and supposed friends regarding my unathletic clumsiness).

Kristine says

My husband just accepted a job in a place where the average winter temperature hovers under 20 degrees and is surrounded by snow-capped Rocky Mountains. Brrr. I have not been excited about the prospect of FREEEEEZING so ferociously. I'm just a warm-blooded, vegas-weather kind of girl.

But sitting with little L this morning and snuggling under blankies while reading 'Twelve Kinds of Ice', I would be lying to say that I wasn't a *little* excited about it. Ellen Obed wrote this book as a kind of ode to her childhood growing up in rural Maine. It's part memoir, part early chapter book, part picture book. And if it doesn't make you want to break out your ice skates, you may have something wrong with you. May I please have some of your idyllic childhood memories, Ms. Obed? And this may provide me just enough motivation to make some garden ice of my own in a lonely Idaho tundra. In fact after finishing it little L immediately hid it in daddy's pillow with a note, "How to make me an ice rink".

Mike says

Beautifully expressive writing in its simplest form. When a book has this characteristic, I couldn't care less about its topic. *Twelve Kinds of Ice* transports you to a Maine farm where winter is the star of the seasons. I was surprised by the tight composure of this slight memoir. Guided into the approaching winter by the characteristics of different ice events, I expected the book to be a sweet reflection through and through. Not so. Well, yes so but it's more than that. Winter is fun and lively once the rink is finished.

Obed picked all the right details to include and all the right details to leave out, making the story sweet and sentimental without it being; eye roll- sweet and sentimental. The boys getting impatient for hockey time, throwing the puck on the ice just to retrieve it. The girls telling the "rink manager" and mom settles the infraction by extending figure skating time by 5 minutes. Just perfect. Yet, we don't have a single character's name. Perfect.

The true genius of the book is in its organization. And, really, everything else about it but let's say the organization stands above. Each "ice" is more spectacular than the next throughout the impending winter. Each "ice" Obed revolves her story around is as potent as the previous. As spring approaches the fleeting "ices" deposit you right at the end of the book. But this one, this book, is so transportive that I longed to flip back 20 pages just to be a part of those glorious winter skates once again. And, I hate ice skating and winter.

Kate says

I love summer, but winter light and winter quiet feed my soul in a different way. If you're that kind of person, too, you won't want to miss this small, lovely book called *TWELVE KINDS OF ICE*, written by Ellen Bryan Obed and illustrated by Barbara McClintock.

Don't expect a novel; this is more the kind of story your grandmother told you over hot chocolate — a remembrance of wintry childhood memories that celebrate all that's good and pure and wildly fun when it comes to being a kid. It starts with the ice on the sheep pails in the narrator's barn, "an ice so thin that it broke when we touched it." The language in this narrative is as crisp and sparkling as the ice itself. But it was the section on Black Ice that resonated with me the most:

"We could see the clouds, the blue sky, the tree-edged shoreline, in the mirror of black ice beneath us. We could see ourselves in the glass, our long-winged spirals, our flashing blades, our new mittens."

Simply beautiful writing. It will make you want to go skating on a frozen lake.

I support independent bookstores. Here's a link to find one near you or buy *TWELVE KINDS OF ICE* via IndieBound: <http://www.indiebound.org/book/978061...>

Scope says

I've ice skated a lot in my life. Growing up in Northern Michigan, it's bound to happen. I used to live around the corner from an ice rink and can remember completing lap after lap during open skate times. But the ice wasn't just at the rink – when November hit, ice could pop up anywhere. It loomed large in my world for

long stretches of the year. *Twelve Kinds of Ice* captures this winter world with all the anticipation and excitement that comes with it. It's a near-perfect book, but one that will need a bit of help to reach a wide audience.

Winter doesn't just appear – we sort of ease in to it. The first ice is thin, and gone as quick as it came. But it comes back.

"The second ice was thicker. We would pick it out of the pails like panes of glass. We would hold it up in our mitten hands and look through it. Then we would drop it on the hard ground and watch it splinter into a hundred pieces."

One chapter leads into the next, following a family as ice emerges. From ice rinks to hockey to late night skates, the family makes the most of the season. It doesn't last, of course, but the memories do.

Every sentence is poetic – carefully crafted with evocative, economical results. Obed proves masterful at bringing the reader to this place, where ice is the backdrop for life. It reads like a memoir. This would work well in a classroom setting as a calm, comforting late fall read aloud. The choice to tell this story through the different types of ice is unexpected, and gives the book a wonderful uniqueness.

To my 31 year old librarian eyes, this is a beautiful book. For kids, it might get lost in the shuffle. It's quiet. It's small. It's a neutral color. It has black and white illustrations. None of these are bad things, mind you – we need books like this in the world more than ever now – but it may have an effect on who decides to pick it up. The best part is as soon as you read it, you'll want to sing its praises.

The illustrations are a study in intricacy, full of fine detail and crosshatching. Beautifully rendered scenes capture the characters, landscapes, joy, and cold.

So handsellers, handsell. Gatekeepers, spread the word. This book is too good for you to stay quiet. Now where are my skates? *Twelve Kinds of Ice* has me ready to lace them up.

Sheri says

Ice is one of the first visible indications of the winter season; it often steals into our world on a chilly night, staying for as long as Mother Nature will allow, and then it steals away again in the bright sunshine of day.

Twelve Kinds of Ice takes the reader through the winter season as seen through one of the markers of the season – ice. Starting with that fragile, thin glaze of ice on the water's surface, we go through the cold, colder, coldest days of winter until we progress to a stronger, thicker block of ice.

The Bryan family shows how it is possible to enjoy and appreciate what nature gives us in the coldest season of the year. Activities centered on the glittering, frozen ice reflect various moods and times: festive skating parties, competitive ice hockey games, silent and still late night skates.

Ice doesn't have to be a dreaded part of winter, instead we can look forward to and dream of old and new ways to enjoy our own perfect ice. All you need is the right attitude and the right ice.

Kathryn says

Twelve Kinds of Ice I love, love, love this book! It so beautifully captures the magic of childhood, of winter, the joy and thrill that comes from being passionate about something, and of being imaginative and loving and determined. It is beautifully written! It's the sort of book I just want to HUG and, oh, how I wished I could have been friends with the Bryan's and go skating with them. Being a California girl (Northern California, but foothills, not mountains), I am used to snow only as an occasional and fleeting treat--and natural ice is something regarded only with deep distrust when it ends up on roadways (ice rinks just pop up at the holidays around shopping centers). I have not had the intimate and longstanding relationship with truly cold winters to understand all the different kinds of ice, let alone appreciate them! This felt like the perfect book to read to begin my first winter in a snowy climate and I am glad it proved to be such a celebration of the season and of the ice it brings. I know I will have my struggles with the less pleasant aspects of the season, but I hope that I will always be able to see the magic in it -- I hope I will be like the Bryan's father, helping my children realize their dreams, and never being too busy to appreciate and revel in the beauty of a starry, winter night.
